Australian War Memorial

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ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

ACCESSION NUMBER: S02756

TITLE: Elisabeth Mazlin's working years in the Land Army, Atherton

INTERVIEWEE: Elisabeth Mazlin

INTERVIEWER: Sue Hardisty

RECORDING DATE: 23 November 1985

RECORDING LOCATION: Malanda property, Queensland

SUMMARY: *Elisabeth Mazlin's working years in the Land Army, Atherton*

Transcribed by WRITEpeople

Transcription Date: January 2004

Well, would you like to tell us, Elisabeth, about when you were born and where you were born?

Well, I was born in Cairns, 1926.

What do you recollect about your early childhood?

Mainly, going to Brisbane, when we left Cairns, and my father was in Brisbane, my parents. And then we came to live in the country at Baileys Creek, where they had a plantation, and I was five year old at that time.

What sort of plantation was it?

They had a banana plantation. It was quite a large area, from what I can remember, and what I'm told since. So, I think, my father and two brothers were into the business. And then from five years old to around about six, I think, the Depression years were fairly severe and we were hit badly. And, of course, lost everything, my parents and his brothers. And then we moved to Cape Tribulation, where there was just virgin jungle and they had to carve their land in the old pioneer style.

What do you know about your father's family, you know, and his ancestors?

Well my father ..... he came from Wales, I think. And came out here and, as far as I can recall, from what I've heard, he started a settlement at Fresh Water, I think, somewhere around Acacia Bank, I think, it was called at that time. And they started a farming community on the banks of the Baron River. That's what I can recall of that.

What about on your mum's side?

My mother was Clara Pommance(?), her maiden name. And she lived at Edge Hill, and her father and mother had a large farm there. And it was a cane farm but, of course, I don't know in the early days, it might have been fruit or orchards, but in the latter years, I can remember going and staying with my Grandmother and Grandfather, and they had this cane farm. And it has since been broken up into allotments and it's, oh, a good part of Edge Hill.

What about your father's, sort of, politics?

Well, he was into politics. He was in the Council at one time. I think he was a Mulgrave Shire, I'm not sure. But I can remember him, he was very strong in his ideas

and his beliefs. I couldn't always tell you what party he belonged to but, I think, in the latter years he might have been what they call "Country Party", I think, it's National now, is it?

Yes. What about your mum?

Oh, well, mum was mum. I don't really recall her being ..... she was a gentle woman and, I think, she just followed my father, whatever he wanted to do. And she had six children to look after, so, I think, her time was pretty well cut out, with doing her work.

What about their religious beliefs?

Yes, well, my father was a Mason. Belonged to the Masonic Lodge and I don't really know anything about that, but they were Methodists. And, oh, they weren't really very strict but, you know, they had a certain code and certain honour, and that was ..... And we lived in the country, so there was no church, or going to Sunday School when we were children. But they certainly didn't give us a lot of religious grounding.

So after you ..... when the Depression came, you said the farm was badly hit, why was that?

Yes, well, that plantation. Well, I think, a lot of companies in those days were ..... they were ..... I couldn't really tell you why they were badly hit, but they lost everything there, and they just had to move out. But being so young, I was the youngest of the six children, so I really couldn't recall.

Do you know how they were able to refinance themselves to start again at Cape Tribulation?

Well, we ..... they did ..... I don't think they had anything left of ..... just a few houses that they could pull down and get the timber and the iron, and so forth, and start again at Tribulation. But, I think, during that time, they could ..... the land was granted by ..... to any settlers by the Government, if they would open it up and settle on it for so many years, and it would become Freehold land. And so they must have known about this, and they'd been up to Cape Tribulation from Baileys Creek, which was, oh, I suppose, it wouldn't very far by sea. There was no road. And it would be about 10, 12 miles perhaps, by sea, to Cape Tribulation. And the three brothers, my father and his two other brothers settled there at Cape Tribulation. And they had to clear the jungle and start off from nothing, I think. We had a

little cottage, actually, a little shack, actually, it was on the beachfront there for some years before we were able to build further in on the farm. And I can remember my father was ..... he had ..... he managed to get some horses, I think, from Baileys Creek. I think we had three horses. And he built this cart and the wheels ..... we didn't have any wheels for the car, so he had to carve them out of logs, so we had big log wheels. And they had to carry a tin of grease around wherever they went because of the squeaking of these wheels, and grease them up all the time. Naturally, we had to have some horses, or something like that for ploughing and bringing produce in, etcetera. So, I think, it was 12 months before they got very much off their land by the time they cleared it, and ploughed it, and harvested, and then we had a cyclone. I think it might have been 1935, '34 or '5. We had a very sever cyclone, and that just about wiped us out again.

Were a lot of people killed in that cyclone?

There were some Thursday Island boys, oh, and luggers, and the luggers sand during that cyclone. They were way out at sea. I remember them coming ashore. And, I think, they just swam with the tide, or with the waves, you know, they didn't really ..... they knew how to adapt

themselves to these conditions. And they came ashore without a stitch of clothing on. And they were just so, so tired. I think they came ashore somewhere down at my uncle's place. And then there was a lugger, they were pearling luggers not far from Cape Tribulation, well, that was sunk and, I think, there was two or three people drowned in that.

And did your shack get knocked over?

No, father was very good at building. Even shacks. He was very cyclone conscious and he built it very strong. He'd been in a few cyclones before. And although ..... we had a tidal surge that came in, and I can remember mother picking tins and bags and all sorts of things up off the floor so that, you know, it wouldn't get destroyed. And, I think, it was knee deep in our little cottage. But .....

Can you remember it yourself?

Yes. Yes, I remember. And I remember my older brothers and sisters, I was a little bit too small to see much, but they climbed up and was able to look out somewhere near the ceiling and the roof, and they were looking at the wind and all the trees.

Were you all huddled in the hut, or where were you?

Oh, no. We were thoroughly enjoying it. My older brothers and sisters were all looking. And father was so busy tying things down, and nailing things up. And he sort of knew that the eye of the cyclone passed over us. And he had tied one side down with wire, or whatever he had, rope, maybe, and then there was all this stillness. And he said, "We've half an hour", or whatever it was, or three quartes of an hour to ..... in the stillness. "Now", he said, "I must run around and do the same to the other side because it will come the other way." And during that half an hour, or it could have been an hour, we had time to go out and rescue our fowls and our goats and things that were, just sort of trees had fallen down on them, and we sort of brought them. I don't know where we brought them. Must have brought them inside, I think. And then it came from the other direction and we had this all over again for, I think, about - it started about 7 o'clock in the morning, or 6 o'clock in the morning, and went through to about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Did you have radio contact then?

No. No.

Gosh, you were quite isolated then?

Yes. And I can remember standing in the front of the - on the verandah, looking out at the sea, and we saw a boat being pushed up by the wind, upside down. It was going north, and my father said, "Oh, gee, I hope that's not my friend." He was a fisherman, but he did lose his friend. Whether it was his boat or not, at that time, I don't know, but he lost his friend during that episode.

And do you remember where you were when war broke out?

Yes, I can remember, I was home. And .....

How did you hear about it?

We did have radio contact then. We had our own radio and it was battery, we had no power, of course. And it was battery, run by batteries. That's my first memory of war breaking out.

Do you remember the response of your parents to the war?

Oh, yes, yes.

What was their response?

Oh, they were very anxious and perturbed. And, of course, at that time, I would have been, what, 14, and I just wasn't that terrible perturbed about it. It was exciting news and I certainly wasn't worried as my parents were.

And were all of you six children, where did you fit in, in terms of when you were born in relation to the others?

Well, I was the youngest.

Right, you were the youngest.

And I had two older sisters, and three elder brothers.

And were they all working on the place?

Well, one brother was an invalid, and he couldn't do very much, but the other two did until later on during the war years and my eldest brother joined the Army. And the other brother was - I think, they refused to take him on

account of they had to leave some men on the farms, and that sort of predicted industries.

And so what was your farm producing before the war came?

Well, it was bananas, and pineapples, vegetables. That was mainly what we had.

And can you tell us when you first heard about ..... or knew about the Land Army?

Well, my first contact with the Land Army (gap on tape), seeing Grace Forrest and Winnie Gladstone arriving at my uncle's farm, and working there, in the Land Army. And I became very friendly with the two girls. I was, by this time, I was on my own, my sisters had left, and I certainly was looking forward to female, younger companionship. And we had lots of picnics and fun together. And I decided then that I would like to join the Land Army.

Where had your sisters gone?

Oh, they had married by this time. And ..... but before that, yes, before that, the ward had ..... the Japanese

had come into the war, and my sister, eldest sister was married, and her husband had joined the Forces. And my father and mother decided that, on account of the Japanese Invasion we were just a little to close and isolated, and we should go south. So, my eldest sister and I went south, to Sydney, and mother and father, one brother stayed behind to work the farm.

Do you know when that was?

What year?

Yes.

Well, that was the same year as the Japanese Submarines bombed Sydney Harbour. That must have been in 19(?)

Don't worry, I'm trying to think when that was. '42 would it be? Yes Possibly '42. I think it was in the early months of '42. I think it could have been.

Could it have been about May '42, I think, because February '42 was the bombing of Darwin?

I couldn't tell you ..... well, yes, I think, it might have been because, I think, we came back from Sydney

about July or August. So, it would have been earlier in the year, and we were there in Sydney. My sister and IU worked in Sydney for awhile.

Where did you stay?

Oh, we had a little kitchen/lounge/bedroom set-up, sort of thing. And I think we paid seven and six a week for that.

Was that just your sister and yourself?

Yes.

Did you go down ..... how did you get down there, to Sydney?

Oh, we went by train. The old steam train. And Sydney was very new to both her and I, because we'd never been to Sydney before, though she was certainly a little bit more worldly than I was. And, anyway, she ..... we both got jobs down there.

What did you do?

Oh, we were working in a factory, in a ..... it was producing soap at the time and so we stayed there until, oh, maybe, August, September.

So how many months do you think you were there?

Probably, about six, seven months.

And what were your impressions of war-time Sydney?

Well, seeing the windows all boarded up, you know, the plate-glass windows in shops boarded up. And we were very happy in Sydney, and enjoyed our stay there, but it certainly was restricted. There was black-outs and all this, black-out time.

Can you tell us about - you said you were there when the subs came in, and you were just sort of in accommodation with your sister and yourself, and it happened at night, did it?

Yes. Yes, we were in bed. I couldn't, I think, it was late at night too. And we heard a ..... we heard the sirens go and, I think, it must have been just after the bombing of Darwin. And, of course, we were all, you know, expecting something, anything could happen. And we

were - we were in bed and we heard sirens go. First reaction was to jump up and put the light on, which we did. And a Warden must have been outside and he called out to, "Put the light out", which we promptly did. And there was a lady in our building that was - who was a Warden - and we heard her go. So we though, "Hello, this is very serious, you know, wonder what's coming?" We did hear planes. And we thought at the time, "Oh, we're going to get bombed, what are we going to do?" We huddled up in bed together, prayed. And then the "All Clear" went later on, and we didn't know until the morning exactly 'til we saw what happened in the papers, what we read in the papers.

Were you crying, were you very distressed?

Oh, yes, we were. Yes, we thought this was possibly our little end to our life. But then they had on display the Jap subs that they had there. And I think people could pay a small fee, go in and see these subs, and we did, we went in and had a good look at them, and they were very small. We thought, "How possibly anybody could live in these little tiny, midget submarines?" So that was that little episode.

Do you think there was any particular event that happened which, you know, made your parents decide to send you to Sydney? I was just wondering at what point the war was up to.

Well, I think, it might have been ..... they were expecting. The Japanese must have been very close. They were coming down through the Islands and taking each Island as they came down. And, I think, they expected ..... certainly, they would take Queensland. Because I do believe that there was a line drawn by the Australian Government, and that the line was Brisbane. And anything north of Brisbane they weren't going to defend.

Did you know about that at that time?

Yes.

Your parents had heard about that?

Yes. Yes. And so we knew that we just ..... they would defend the Southern States, but we probably would be invaded. And, I think, we came very closes to that in the Coral Sea Battle.

Were you ..... do you think your mother was in fear up there?

I think she was. They had their own certain plans that they'd made and they had stored tins of rice, and things that would store well. And they were going to go overland, over the mountains somewhere. They had a map, a route that they'd already picked out that which was they would go, but fortunately it never came to that. I think Cairns and the Tablelands and all these small towns had all the situation all worked out and what they were going to do, and where they would go because they all expected, definitely, an invasion, at that time.

Did you ..... when you were ..... sorry, before you went down to Sydney, did you have any picture in your head about what might happen, you know, about whether there would be planes, or whether they'd come by sea or ..... did you have any pictures in your mind about what the invasion would actually mean?

No. No. I used to hear mother and father talking about it. I knew that if they came that we'd be probably slaves. We'd be under their rule and ..... when you're young, it doesn't sort of affect you to a degree, like it

does when you're older. You don't really see the seriousness of it.

Was your brother away at that time? Where was he?

Yes. He was in New Guinea. He joined the Infantry. And he was in New Guinea. He was a scout for some time up there.

Did you get much correspondence back from him?

Yes, we ..... oh, there were times when we never. He was away sometimes three weeks, out in scouting in the bush and that. And certainly when he came home on leave - I think he was up there the first time, about 12 months - and certainly when he came home the first time, he was definitely what they called "Shell Shocked." Any loud noise or someone would pick up perhaps a salt cellar at the table and drop it, accidentally, and he would be in shock. You know, his eyes would be wild and staring, and he was in this state, well, for quite some time. And ..... but then he was sent back after leave to his unit. And he went back again to New Guinea. But the second time, I think, he wasn't sent out as a scout, he was, I think, he was in a ..... closer to troops and those sort of things, which wasn't quite so bad on him.

And going back to Sydney, are there any other things you remember about war time Sydney, any other things that struck you? What about the servicemen on the streets, were there many about?

Yes. There was quite a lot of servicemen and Americans. I can remember one restaurant, or cafe as we used to call it those days, we were sitting in there, my sister and I, having a meal, and this American, drunk American sailor, was declaring to anyone who would listen to him how they had to come over and save the Australians. And we were a little bit disgusted with this. They way he was skiting about, "All you Aussies can't look after yourselves", and so on, "we had to come over here and save you." And so, we weren't very much impressed with the Americans, I can tell you, at that stage.

Any other aspects of war-time Sydney?

No, not really.

What did you used to do socially then at night, after you'd finished work?

Oh, there was plenty of theatres, you now, to go to. And, oh, we used to go around having a look at different places we hadn't been to, Katoomba and Bondi Beach. And it was the trams, of course, those days. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

And then, why did you go back home?

Well, my sister's husband had arrived in Toowoomba. I don't know exactly where he was, I can't remember. But he arrived in Toowoomba and he said, "Would she join him in Toowoomba?', so we both came back from Sydney to Toowoomba. And he was stationed there for some months. And then from Toowoomba, he was sent to Cairns where he was discharged on, I think, it was the grounds of ..... he wanted to go back into the timber industry or something and, I think, they discharged him so he could. He had trucks and bulldozers and things like that. So they discharged him, and my sister and I came back to Cairns which is - was a zone - a war zone - and civilians couldn't come in and out of Cairns unless they had a permit. And so, we were allowed in too because her husband was being discharged, and I was to go home to my parents.

Where did you get your permit from?

Oh, I couldn't tell you. I think, my sister handled that, and I can't even remember. I suppose, we had to apply to the government or some local government department.

> Were civilians allowed to the back-side of the Cairns district? Like, you know, your parents were still up at Tribulation and that, but you're saying they weren't allowed in the Cairns .....

No, well, people who went out of the area, or new people trying to come into it, they had to have a permit. So people who were already there, that was all right. But this was just coming and going, you just couldn't. You could leave all right, but you just couldn't get back in because of the troops. There were so many thousands and thousands of troops. And not only our troops, but American troops. I can remember in Atherton of a - I think, they used to have movies every - I'm not sure if they had them every night during the war years, certainly, the soldiers had to line up. They were lining up in daylight. And the queue was so long, it would go down half the street. But civilians could walk in ahead, and they didn't have to queue. But there was so many soldiers, just queueing up to go in. Have a nights

entertainment. And the dances were every night, I think, we had ..... there were dances at the Shire Hall, that I remember. And .....

This is when you were in the Land Army at Atherton?

Yes. And every dance was a tap. So, you know, I mean, a soldier could get a dance. That was part of my memory of war years in Atherton.

So if we can pick the story up when you went from Sydney you went back to your parent's place?

Yes, and that's when I met Grace Forrest and Winnie Gladstone and I decided, well, it's time I did something more, too. And I joined the Land Army and was sent to Stanthorpe. Went to Brisbane, and then from Brisbane sent to Stanthorpe, or Ballandean, actually, just a little place.

Can you remember, you know, how you organised that from Cape Tribulation?

Well, I think, I remember getting the address from Grace and Winnie, and I wrote away and applied. And my father had to sign, I think, and I signed up and .....

How did your parents feel about you signing up?

They didn't mind. They didn't say they minded. And I know I got terribly home-sick though, the first few weeks away, but I adjusted soon.

So, then you sort of got correspondence back from Manpower to tell you where you had to go. Were you required to do any training?

No, just sent to ..... probably, they sent me a pass on the train to Brisbane. And I was met at Roman Street by one of the ladies, Land Army ladies, taken to Headquarters there. They had Headquarters there and interviewed. And then they had booked accommodation for myself and another lass who had joined. Where from, Brisbane, I think, I joined. And we had accommodation together there, the next day, then we were put on the train to Ballandean, or Stanthorpe. And we were met there by the farmer, and picked up and taken to our new quarters, and there was no training.

It's quite a hike down from Cape Tribulation down to Ballandean.

Yes, I can remember even while I was ..... the Headquarters, there was a reporter came in and she interviewed me for a little while and she said ..... asked me a few questions about Cape Tribulation, etcetera. Next day in the paper there was a little paragraph "Long Trip by Land Army Girl." (close the window ..... gap ..... that was quite some storm, wasn't it)?

So we left off with the newspaper caption of you going down to ..... what newspaper was that ..... going down to Ballandean?

I think, it was Courier Mail, Brisbane Courier Mail. And I often wish I'd kept that paragraph, but it disappeared over the years.

And then what can you remember your first impressions of ..... were you by yourself, by the way, travelling down, or did you say you went with somebody else?

No, by myself from Cairns to Brisbane and then this ..... I was put with this other girl, and we were sent from Brisbane to Stanthorpe. Then out to our barracks, out to our farm. It was Colvin Brothers had a large, I think,

it might have been a sheep station at one time , and they'd been ..... gone out of sheep and were growing vegetables, mainly, tomatoes, again. And we lived in the homestead and they lived in the barracks somewhere.

Do you remember when it was that you joined up?

What year?

Yes.

That must have been 194? 1943.

Because we said the subs came into Sydney Harbour at the end of May '42 and you thought you went home about the August, so how long were you home?

She must have been just before Christmas, I think, before Christmas 1942.

Were you home for a couple of months, or do you know if you were home for a year?

I don't know, I can't remember. Wait a minute '43. I was married in '45. It must have been '43, I joined up.

I must have been home for a few months, six months or something.

Going back to that train journey, you know, down to Ballandean, I mean, did you have to sleep on the train for a few nights?

Yes. Two nights, or three it might have been. It was a longer journey those days with the steam train. And we had to sleep, we had a sleeper. Or did we? No, I think, during the war, I don't think we got sleepers. I think, we just sat there and if you had to, if you could find a little space to lay on the floor, you laid on the floor. There were people laying in corridors and anywhere they could find a little bed for the night.

Did you feel quite safe as a 16 or 17 year old then or not?

Yes, I felt ..... I was in a carriage with woman, another woman or two, and it wasn't mixed. I can't remember if it was mixed. And, certainly, there was no lounge car or club car or restaurant on the train. Every station there was a little cafe and you got there and had your sandwiches, or a meal, if they stayed long enough, but that was just a mad rush.

Do you know how long you were at the Colvin's, how long your placement was there?

I would say about five months.

Well, could you go into a bit more detail about what your work actually entailed?

Yes. Mr Colvin used to come in his truck and drive us to whatever field he wanted us to work in. Got quite a big area, as I say, so many square miles, and if he wanted a lass to work the horses. He had beautiful Clydesdale horses and that. They used to pull the scarify. I can't remember any tractors, but he must have had tractors. I suppose, he drove them himself. And a girl that was used to horses would be allotted to that job. And then there was, oh, picking tomatoes, packing tomatoes. We'd take them down to the packing shed, and whatever, you know.

What happened when it rained?

Oh, can't remember it raining. But, I suppose, we would be put in the packing shed doing something. It was very hot and dry. It was very hot and dry.

Sorry, you said you were at an individual billet there were you, you weren't at the Ballandean Camp?

Well, that, no. No, I don't think there was a camp. I think this camp, this building, or this Camp where we were was the biggest there in this area, otherwise, they would have been just billeted by two's and three's on other farms. And I think there was about 18, 19 girls there at this one property. And, as I said, we had the old homestead.

What was the set-up there for cooking and so forth?

Yeah, there was a kitchen, and they had a cook and Matron, and Supervisor.

Who was your Matron, do you remember?

I can't remember. She was a very young lass. They had a very big ..... (halt to tape)

Oh, well, that's the second time the power's gone off, we'll see how we go this time. Now, you had just explained about your work at Ballandean and I was asking you about the cooking set-up and you said there was a Matron?

Yes, and the cook.

What about your social life down there, what did you do out-of-hours?

Well, we lived a fair way from the little township, which wasn't much. It was only a little store, dance hall, one or two shops. And they had dances every Saturday night there, so we were allowed ..... the bus used to come out and pick us up, and we'd go into the dance. But other than that, there was certainly nothing else. I think it was about four miles from Ballandean, so it would be a good walk there and back, especially, at night. And when you got in there they had nothing to do. And Stanthorpe was about, I suppose, just guessing, 16 miles away.

What about, was there a piano, or recreation hall where you were?

No.

Can you remember any sing-songs, any fun the girls made themselves?

Oh, yes, sometimes they'd have a little sing-song or play cards. There was a telephone, I remember that. We'd ring up a few friends that we got to know. Boyfriends mainly.

Was there any Army personnel in the area?

Yes, there were a few, mainly, in Stanthorpe. They'd drive ..... they'd come to the dance, of course.

And so, you thought you were there for about how many months?

I'd say about five months. That's where I met Myrtle Blight there.

Where was Myrtle from?

She's from Brisbane. And then we got sent from Ballandean to ..... as I said, Cape Tribulation.

And could you tell us about how you got sent back to your father's farm?

Well, he wrote and told ..... he was applying for two Land Army girls to work on his property for the season.

And he said, “Would you like me to name you as one of the girls?” And I wrote back and said, “Oh, yes, please.” And he said, “Have you got a friend that would like to come up with you?” So, apparently, the Land Army had no objection to that, so that’s how we came to go up there. We were sent to Cape Tribulation.

Could you tell us about the work you did at Cape Tribulation, when you were there with Myrtle?

Yes, well, we mainly ..... oh, we ..... we had a tractor, and we did ploughing. And chipped the weeds, and picked the pineapples and variations, and mostly tomatoes because, I think, they were sending so many tomatoes to the troops. And it was just tending the tomatoes from right little seedlings, right through to packing them.

Were you able to get petrol for the tractor during the war?

Yes. I think, our tractor ran on kerosene. It was one of these old timers and, I think, they had kerosene for it. Little bit of petrol to start it or something.

And could you explain about how, you know, you got your produce from the farm to the market?

Well, by this time, a few years had passed from the old cart with the wooden wheels to the good wheels, and a better type of cart, and still the same old horses, and they'd load up this cart. Take it out, mile, mile and a half to the bay area, where the launch used to arrive once a week. And they'd ..... the day before the launch arrived they'd load up all the packed produce and take it to the bay. There was this packing ..... not a packing shed just a holding shed there, and they'd put most of it in there. And next day, the men would take the ..... load it onto the punts and the punts would take it out to the launch.

Who were the men who were doing the loading?

Well, my father and brother on our place. And on the other farms were two cousins and an uncle and there were other farms by this time, other people had come there. There were two other farmers, they were bachelors, I think, and they used to bring their produce up. Sometimes they used to bring it up, row all the way for about four miles up the coast, or down the coast.

Were you and Myrtle involved in that, you know, transferring the ..... the loading?

Not really, no, it was very heavy work. And the men did that, and we mainly just did the packing and picking, and the farm work.

And do you know where the tomatoes went once they .....

No. I think they might have been sent to COD, or part of them sent to COD.

And what's that?

I don't know what that stood for, but it was, apparently, a sort of semi-government. I think, they have a COD now, don't they?

Not sure.

Not sure. But everything - it's like a .....

Commonwealth Ordinances Department?

.....marketing board, and then they would be sent out to .....

So did your father have a Contract with the Army?

I think he did, yes. I know a lot of it went to .....

Do you know if the farm produced more during the war years, or less?

Oh, more, definitely. We had a lot more. The market was far, far better during the war years, I suppose, for all the troops, etcetera, especially, around the north.

When you were doing the work, you know, were you sort of aware that it was sort of a direct involvement in the war effort? Did you see it as that then?

Yes. Oh, yes, yes. And at one time, there was a rumour went around that they were ..... the Government were thinking of sending Army girls to New Guinea to grow vegetables for the troops up there and, of course, all the girls were saying, "Oh, I hope I'm picked, I hope I go" and all this but, of course, it didn't eventuate. So ..... I guess, it was only a rumour probably. I can remember one of the exciting, I think, it's exciting, or I thought it was exciting those days. Travelling in the trains with all the girls, there might be 20 Land Army

girls. We were being sent from Ballandean to Brisbane and then a lot of them were sent up north. And when the train stopped at the station there would be no going through the door. All out the window you'd see about 30 girls all out the windows, and they'd all have their overalls on. And I thought this was fantastic to be able to get out the window.

Was that because the trains were so crowded or what?

Oh, probably, crowded and because it was ..... just because one person did it, I suppose, the rest thought, "Oh, well, I'm going to be in this too." Were the stations blacked-out in any way? You know, I mean, was there any sort of .....
Oh, there was a light, yes. But, I suppose, it was ..... everything was sort of shaded down.

Like, could you see the name of the station, or was that blacked out?

I'm not too sure about that, I couldn't tell you, it could have been. But I knew the countryside up this way so well, I'd know the stations. I think, the stations were still ..... I think, the name must have been there.

Excuse me, so after you'd been at your parent's place, so you were transferred again?

Yes. We were transferred then into the Atherton Tableland, or into Atherton. And we possibly up here, both Myrtle Blight, and myself arrived in barracks in Atherton. There must have been about 30 girls, approximately, there. And we would have been there probably six months.

So when did Myrtle meet your brother?

Well, when she was working at Cape Tribulation. My brother came home on leave, and they met. And within a period of, I would say, two or three weeks, they were married. So when we were ..... after he left and went back to his unit, he was sent to the Atherton Tablelands, and when we were posted to Atherton, it was quite good for those two, because they were able to see and meet each other again during those months, while we were there. And, I think, that was right up until about the time we left, and then he was sent - I couldn't tell you if he was sent back to New Guinea or if he was sent south.

And who did you work for at Atherton?

Wyatt Brockley. Who again was growing vegetables for the troops. He had a farm on the Upper Baron. No, I don't think it was Upper Baron.

Not sure where?

No, it was towards Malanda. And, oh, had cabbages and turnips and beans and all sorts of vegetables. Variety of vegetables that we picked, packed. We were taken out each day in trucks to each farm. Just mention, that before work each day, we'd rise at perhaps 6 o'clock and there were two girls posted for duties in the kitchen, have to peel vegetables, or whatever. Get the vegetables ready for the dinner that night before we went to work. We'd be on for a week, and then another two girls would come on, and so forth. So we really had an hour's work done in the morning before we had breakfast, and then off to work. And I can remember buckets and buckets of potatoes, peeling potatoes. So ..... but, otherwise, we just made our own beds, or they were stretchers, you know, pellets.

Do you remember the work life being very different for yourself during your Land Army days compare to, say, when you were working on your father's farm,

before you joined the Land Army? I mean, die you work set .....

Well, it was an eight hour day during the Land Army. But it wasn't an eight hour day when I was at home. It was only in the busy times when they needed extra, that I'd be called, you know, to go. And it certainly wouldn't have been very day. So .....

Maybe if we go back to Cape Tribulation, I was quite interested to ask you there about malaria. Could you tell us what you know about the dangers of malaria during the war, or about how malaria affected you?

Yes. Well, at the time when we contracted malaria we didn't ..... we had no idea it was malaria. We just thought it was a very, very bad fever. A scrub fever, which often used to reoccur at different places. And I can tell you it was very, very bad because we were sick. And when we did discover it was malaria, I think, we got quite a shock, really, to find it was malaria.

And could you work, or sort of could you work one day and couldn't work the next?

Oh, no, no. It wasn't .....when we had it, when we were sick, we'd have one good day, well, what I call a good day, you're feeling a little better, and the next day you'd be just so sick, you couldn't hardly lift your head up off the pillow. And it was very, very .....Oh, I think, that must have gone on for about two or three weeks.

Did Myrtle get it?

I believe she might have had an attack of malaria, I'm not too certain on that point.

Who do you know that had malaria first in your district there?

Well, I think, as I said, the VDC men had it. But before, prior to that we had a cousin who arrived on leave and he had an attack of malaria. He was just back from New Guinea and he had an attack of malaria while he was staying with us on leave, so he had certain quinine, etcetera, with him, so he was able to get over that attack all right. And, I think, that's - from then on we had the malaria up there at the Cape.

And do you know whether the girls, Winnie and Grace, working at your uncle's place, whether they got it or not?

I don't know. I couldn't be certain if they did. Actually, I think, when Myrtle and I went back to Cape Tribulation, I don't know if they were there the second time, they could have been. But I can't remember, recall, having associated a lot there. I suppose, we were busier. And whether they had left by that time.

And so, did you inform the Land Army that you had malaria? Can you remember any of that detail?

I don't think so. I can't think that I did. Although, I think, that I got the doctor. There was an Army doctor who came up to visit the men in the VDC that were sick with it. And he came and saw us and he diagnosed us as malaria. And, I think, I remember writing to him, asking him to sign a paper that I could get two weeks sick leave, or sick pay. And, I think, he did sign that for me. So I must have notified the Land Army.

Then you were saying earlier about getting some help once you went into Cairns on leave once?

Yes, I got an attack there, in Cairns, and I went to Base Hospital in Cairns and I was in there a few days with malaria. And then years, every year I would have a reoccurrence of malaria for about seven years, but then, eventually, it just died out.

Was that because you left the district or anything?

No, I was married at that time and living in Atherton, and it used to come, just every so often. And, of course, you knew the symptoms, and we'd take some quinine or go to the doctor and get some quinine.

Can you, I know it was a long time ago, but do you sort of remember who paid the bills in connection with your illness, you know, the hospital, for example?

I think, the hospital. We've always had free hospitals in Queensland. So just go to the hospital doctor and it was all free.

Do you recall where you were when Townsville was bombed?

Townsville?

Yes.

No, I .....

Did you hear about any raids on Townsville?

I probably did. It might have been the time when I was in Sydney, certainly, I think .....

July ’42?

Yes, I think, it might have been ..... was that probably after Darwin, was it?

Yes, and after Sydney.

Yes. Yes, I probably was ..... I could have been in Toowoomba at that time. I’m not too sure. But I was certainly ..... was very concerned when I heard these bombings were up north, and we were down south.

Did you hear anything about the odd bit of bombing on Sydney, Sydney suburbs, from ships?

At that time?

Yes.

Yes. We had ..... it was all broadcast. And, I think, a certain amount of it was kept quiet. But then there was a lot of it they couldn't keep quiet. Certainly ..... it was only the once it happened, though, wasn't it?

Talking with the other girls who were in the Land Army, were you aware of, you know, how your parents and relatives were in a slightly different situation to others?

No, not really.

I was just thinking of living in far North Queensland, and what that meant relative to others living a bit further south?

No, it didn't seem to affect us, or we never thought it was anything different. There was probably girls from Cairns, as well as others. Grace and Winnie came from Mt Mulligan. Well, that's not too far away from ..... you know, still in North Queensland. And other girls, probably, I met up with that came from Cairns.

Did you make cases at all, you know, for packing, at your parent's place?

Yes.

Could you explain what part you were involved in?

Yes, well ..... Both my uncle and my father had small sawmills for their own use and they used to cut the timber for case making. And we used to often make ..... That was a wet weather job, you know, in the packing shed making cases. Was quite simple really. Just to make the ends and the boards across from the ends, and you've got your one side open and that's where you pack and then you nail the boards across on the top. And mostly bananas were done like that. We didn't have the simple cardboard cartons you have today. It would have been a lot simpler, had we. That was just part of living, part of work.

Do you remember any sort of discussion, you know, your father was still sort of short on labour, was there any thought of employing Aborigines at any time?

I do believe that a couple of times he had thought of it. But I don't think that at that time they were very experienced, and he didn't think it was worth it.

Did you come across any internees, or Prisoners of War?

Yes. When in Ballandean, on the Colvin's Bros farm, they had Italian Prisoners of War there, on their farm, working, and they had a barracks. And they weren't under guard or anything. And, I think, they had a very good time, actually.

And how many were there?

There could have been four or five. I don't ever, actually, remember working with them. Maybe we were kept a little apart from them, but we often seen them. And we knew where they lived in another small cottage there on the farm. And, I think, well, I felt a little bit resentful to think that they had such an easy life, like, not under guard, well fed, well clothed, and a certain amount of freedom which wasn't given to our soldiers over in their country. And, I think, most of the girls felt like that because we used to often walk pat their cottage and mumble to ourselves, you know, "Look, at them", and,

"they shouldn't be allowed to have the freedom that they've got." And they would often stand at the door smiling at us, you know, and ..... But they certainly ..... we didn't feel very sympathetic towards them.

And were they Prisoners of War, or Internees?

No, Prisoners of War.

Did you ever hear, sort of, life stories, like, where they'd come from, or where they'd been captured?

No, we never mixed. I never, ever thought to ask Mr Colvin.

Where did they work relative to the Land Army girls?

They worked on the same property.

Yes, but were you working alongside each other, or in different parts of the paddock?

Oh, I would say, mostly, in different parts of the paddocks. I don't ever remember working alongside of them, but, probably, we could see them.

Did you know any? Did you ever meet any girls of, you know, Italian descent in the Land Army because there are quite a lot of Italians in the district, aren't there, in the Tableland?

Yes. I can't ever remember, no ..... meeting any.

Where did you enjoy working best?

I suppose, I enjoyed the Atherton Tablelands best because the company of the girls. There was always a good atmosphere in a large camp. And the Matron here, at that time, was very nice, and very good. She'd allow us to have dances sometimes in our barracks. And she'd invite a certain section of soldiers. I don't know, she must have known exactly who she wanted, and there'd be so many allowed in. And we'd have a dance. And sometimes if you had a friend who was a soldier, and you could invite him for Saturday night, or Sunday night tea. And, of course, he'd feel very embarrassed sitting at the table with about 20 girls or so, but we thought it was great fun, and just to enjoy his embarrassment. But the Matron was very good and .....

Do you know who that was? Was it Dean?

No. If I heard the name, I'd remember, no, I'm sorry. But the girls company was certainly appreciated.

Did you feel you had much in common with the other girls?

Yes, oh, yes.

What sort of backgrounds did they come from?

All different backgrounds, city. There was one little lass came from some area in Brisbane. She was, actually, a very nice little girl. And, I believe, later, she married a very well-to-do gentleman, and she ..... Then there was other girls that came from ..... I had a special friend that lived in Biloela, at Ballandean. No, we just fitted in like hand-in-glove, really, we got on fine.

Did you feel that there was much difference in the social backgrounds of the girls?

Not really. Not much difference. We were all girls when we got into camp, and we thought pretty well the same, and did the same things.

Can you remember what you used to talk about, you know, in terms of, I guess, social life, and all that sort of thing?

No, I suppose, we talked about our homes and we'd talk about each other. And we'd talk about our dances and boyfriends, and what we were going to do. And just like ordinary girls or teenagers today. Of the good fun, good times we might have, etcetera, and of the war years. We were very proud of our brothers and finances, whoever we had, and fathers away at the war. We were all very proud of that.

How safe was it for a young girl in the Land Army in Atherton, at the time, with so many troops stationed in the area?

Well, she had to be very careful because, as I say, there were many thousands of troops and we never went out alone, always in a group, preferably. If we would ..... prefer to go, have three, four, five or more girls to walk from our barracks to the dance hall. We were allowed leave every night till 9.30. We had to be back in the barracks at 9.30, except we had two late leave nights a week, and they were till 11.30. So that was

Tuesday, and Saturday night, and any other night we went out, it was 9.30.

So did there tend to be pairing off with boys in the services, or did you go out in groups?

Oh, no, there was pairing off. We had different boyfriends. And if we did have a boyfriend, well, they'd call at the barracks and pick us up, usually, and we'd walk down with them, and probably several other girls too. We might be going to the movies, or to a dance.

Did the Matron ever think it was necessary to give, sort of, sex education talks or talk about VD or birth control, that sort of thing?

No, no, it's a shame, though. Because it might have been a good thing if she sort of ..... But there was never any talks given to us on those sort of things.

Did you know any girls who got pregnant?

No.

No, it's just interesting to try and find out, you know.

No, I didn’t know of anybody who got pregnant in all the camps, well, there wasn’t that many.

What about girls who were having relationships with girls, you know, lesbianism, did you notice any of that sort of thing?

No, never saw it, or never heard of it even.

How much contact did you have with the local community, say, at Atherton?

Well, actually, we didn’t ..... the only people that I got to know of was my husband’s people, civilians, that is, and maybe one or two shopkeepers. There was never any social activities for the girls, or if there had been, I hadn’t been aware of it.

What about at Ballandean?

No, no, definitely, not at Ballandean because it was such a small, tiny little place.

Did you double the population, did you?

Yes, I think we did. But there certainly wasn't ..... there was nothing, actually. Even the canteen in Atherton, we were told we shouldn't go to the canteen because of so many troops, but there was hardly enough cigarette supplies, etcetera, for the troops. And the Matron did tell us that we shouldn't go to the canteen because of that. So we used to try and get out cigarettes, or our extras from the shops, and it was very hard to get from there too. There was always a shortage of cigarettes. And, of course, those days, girls smoked quite a bit.

Did you smoke?

Yes, I did.

When did you start?

Oh, I started possibly when I was in the Land Army.

Did you ever hear of, you know, any of your girlfriends, or acquaintances in the Land Army, sort of, being sexually harassed by any of the servicemen, or their employers?

No, I have never heard of that. Actually, I found the employers were very careful to keep themselves and their - the girls, you know, on a strict, business-like ..... they wouldn't get too friendly with the girls. But, I suppose, there were other ones ..... Although I do think Winnie Gladstone was ..... she was going with one of the Mason boys there for a time so, I suppose, that's natural. And then Myrtle and my brother, sort of, fell in love and married.

Can you remember people's comments when you were travelling from one place to the other, when you used to wear your Land Army uniform?

No, I think ..... there was so many troops around, and so many Army girls, it was just taken for granted.

But people knew the Land Army uniform, did you feel, or not?

Not really. If they saw you in overalls, they'd probably say, "Right, Land Army girl", but if they saw you in your dress uniform it didn't look unlike AWAS and so, I think, they probably just took you for a, you know, AWA, so I never heard. There was just so many women and so many

men in uniform that to be a civilian was almost a novelty.

Did you know any girls in the Services?

In the other Services? Oh, yes, I knew a lass or two, one in the Army and some as nurses. There was a big Army hospital just outside of Atherton, a place called Rocky Creek, and there was a friend. She was mainly a friend of Myrtle's and we used to go down there sometimes and visit her, she was a nurse there in the Army hospital.

Were you aware of how your conditions were different, you know, your pay?

Yes, very aware. And we were very aware that we never got the privileges that the other girls got. We used to think it was very unfair, but I used to often think about changing, actually. And..... but, I didn't.

And where did you meet your husband?

I met him in Atherton. He was staged, camped here in the area, and he had not long got back from New Guinea. And, actually, his parents resided on Golf Links Road, and that was the same street, or road that our billets were

there, our barracks. So we met ..... this lass, one of the Land Army girls, she was ..... I was quite friendly with her, and she used to say, "Oh, come down to this house. There's some lovely people down the road, I would like you to come down and meet these people, the Mazlins." And I said, "Oh, I'm not too fussed about going down to meet the Mazlins." Well, Saturday afternoon you usually shampoo your hair and all the little odds and ends you want to do. Do your washing, iron. Anyway, a few weeks had passed and she still said, "Come on down, come on down." So I did go down there this afternoon, and that's where I met my husband. That's how that started. Our romance started there.

Did he get any postings away before you married?

No. Oh, he was posted to Cairns for a short time, and then back to Atherton. And we were engaged, we became engaged and then, I think, I left the Land Army about that time, and he was sent to Brisbane, or sent somewhere.

And what time was that, that you married?

We married in 1945. This was 1944 when I was in Atherton, and we married just before the war ended in

1945. And after we were married, he was sent to Brisbane. So then .....

So what did you do? Did you go there too?

After about three months, I think, he was able to get ..... houses and flats were so hard to get, and you just had to wait for somebody to leave, or know somebody that you could ..... So, eventually, he did get a flat. Actually, it was only a room and use of conveniences. And I went down to Brisbane and joined him there. And then he was demobbed after about three months.

So you left directly from the Land Army, you went straight down there, or did you have a period at home?

No, I had a period at home for about three or four months, I think. Three months, I think, it might have been, after I was engaged. And then I ..... we were sort of waiting for the right time to get married and leave for him, etcetera. And so .....

And what work did your husband find then, after he left the Army?

Well, his father had a business in Atherton, and he joined his father in the business for a time. Quite a few ..... about three years or four years 'til his father sold the business, and then we went to ..... then he joined North Queensland Electricity Board, and he studied and became a linesman there. And he was there for many years.

And how did your parents manage the farm once Myrtle and you had left?

Well, I still had a brother that worked there. And then when my other brother got out of the Army, the one that married Myrtle, well, he went back to the farm, so ..... And then .....

Myrtle went back too?

Yes, and she went back too, and they built a home there, and they helped. Then my sister and her husband went back to the farm. And her husband was brought in as a partner, or whatever, into the place, but they worked there. Actually, my sister and her husband were there while we were in the Land Army. So ..... there was plenty of help, really.

And just getting back to one point, about the malaria, did you ever hear of any sort of talk which was going on by letter, on a Federal level, about, you know, girls north, in particular, not being employed in the Land Army because of malaria, which was very, specifically, referring to you lot at Cape Tribulation?

No, I haven't heard it at all. Actually, I was quite surprised when you mentioned that to me yesterday.

Did you get transferred from Cape Tribulation, or did you ask for a transfer?

Well, my husband, my father ..... the season had finished, so he must have written to the Land Army, and explained and they just posed us to wherever they thought was suitable. And Atherton being closer, and they needed girls up here. They sent us on up here.

When you look back on that time, did you ever think about, like, if the war hadn't come, what direction your life might have taken?

Yes. Certainly, I knew that I would be leaving home, and probably going to work in Cairns, as my sisters had done.

And when we reached the age of 15, 17, 18, father looked around for a very respectable job for us. So, he was very particular with his daughters, so I knew that I would be. But I was very pleased to go into the Land Army because I admired the girls that were up there, and I enjoyed the company of the other girls. I think, being in the bush so long you tend to become, what is the word, hungry, I think, for other companions.

So there were a lot of positive aspects to the war, you know, in terms of the effect on your life?

Oh, yes, oh, yes, it was.

Was it sort of a fun time too, in terms of that the social life was quite good at the camps?

Oh, yes, it was fun. It was a very good time of my life.

And were you corresponding with your brother during the war years?

Probably, one or two, yes, I think, I was. I think, I was corresponding with a sailor whom I met up at Cape Tribulation, actually. They were on a small patrol boat, and they called in there. And Grace and Winnie,

probably, knew them too. And I corresponded with one of the young farmers there for some years. And, probably, some different Army men that I'd met here and there along the way.

Did you ever see any Japanese during the war?

No.

And how do you feel about, you know, once you were dismissed from the Land Army, or you left it a little bit earlier than when the final - they finally wound down, how do you feel about how you were treated in terms and conditions relative to the Services?

Well, as I said, I felt disappointed that the Land Army was never, ever recognised, like the other Services, Women's Services. But we knew the conditions before we joined, so there was no, nothing, no come-back, really. There was never any money put aside, only ..... I think, other service girls had money they could put aside, deferred pay, or whatever it was. And there was never anything like that for us, we had to just save what we could, if we wanted to save. And, yes, we certainly knew it wasn't, well, what we thought it could have been.

Did you got to the Victory Day March anywhere?

No.

Where were you when the war ended?

Well, as I ..... I was in Atherton, as I said, and my husband was in Brisbane at the time, and I was staying in Atherton at his parents.

Were there any celebrations in Atherton that day?

Oh, yes, of course. There was victory celebrations. They had quite a parade, and floats and all sorts of picnic celebrations.

Was the Land Army part of the floats, or marching, do you know?

I just don't know. Yes, I think, they were at that time, yes.

You know, looking back, do you feel that the work the Land Army did has been adequately acknowledged?

I don't think so. No, I don't think so. I mean, where did you hear anything of what the Land Army did. Not really. I haven't heard any, in all these years. I suppose, it's the same with women who worked in munitions and who gave their time and all that. Although they might have been, probably, well paid, I don't know. But we certainly weren't well paid. But, I suppose, it was, at the time, it was enough.

> You know, we're making a film on the Land Army, and I'm interested to know from you, what the main things are that you'd like to communicate to a general audience, about what it meant to be in the Land Army. What are the main images you'd like to see presented to an audience?

Well, firstly, I suppose, because I was part of the Land Army, they should have had more recognition for what they did. Because, I feel, that what they did was just as equal as Army Girls and perhaps Air Force lasses were doing their bit for the war, well, so did the Land Army did do. And I don't think they received the recognition or the ..... there was no such thing as Pensions, or if you got hurt in the Land Army, I don't think you were compensated, in any way, like, you would have been in

other services. And I think that's the main thing, really, I would like to see that rectified.

Any other memories you have of that time, any little stories you'd like to tell, or anything else you'd like to add? There's no rush, take your time.

No, I don't think so, just that they were happy times. I enjoyed the Land Army, very much, and, as I said, I enjoyed the companions. And you always had, usually, ended up with one special mate, and whatever camp I was in, I always had one special friend. And we didn't always get sent away together. In Ballandean, I left a very good friend there. She was posted somewhere else. And then you work with other girls you become very close to. And, no, I think, I enjoyed it really. I enjoyed the companionship.

Thanks very much.

You're welcome.